

# Department of Justice High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project *Seattle, Washington*



## Addressing Interoperability

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Wireless Management Office (WMO) is working to improve long-term federal interagency communications across the Nation. As an interim step, and as a response to a request from the House/Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee staff, the DOJ WMO has been leading the High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project (“25 Cities”) to provide targeted cities with basic and immediate interagency communications capabilities among local, state, and federal agencies during emergency response. Twenty-five cities were selected using criteria that included perceived risk and population size. As stakeholders in 1 of the 25 cities, Seattle metropolitan area local, state, and federal public safety agencies have been working collaboratively with the DOJ WMO to address basic interoperable communications.

## Participating Agencies

Partnership among Seattle area local, state, and federal public safety agencies has been instrumental in the development of comprehensive interoperability solution sets. Participating agencies have included—

- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
- City of Tacoma
- Drug Enforcement Administration
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Internal Revenue Service
- King County
- Pierce County
- Port of Seattle
- Snohomish County
- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- U.S. Marshals Service
- U.S. Navy
- U.S. Secret Service
- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Washington State Emergency Management
- Washington State Patrol

## Key Successes

DOJ and area stakeholders successfully achieved interoperability and emergency response communications improvements in the Seattle metropolitan area through the implementation of three interoperability solutions. The solutions leverage existing communications systems within a three-county area, while also providing new interoperability resources. Additionally, in the course of meeting this project’s interoperability goals, stakeholders were able to leverage and expand the working relationships among local, state, and federal agencies to foster the development of new interoperability objectives for the area.

The first solution directly ties six major public safety radio systems together using microwave or fiber circuits to create the Tri-County Interoperability System (TRIS). These circuits provided dispatcher-to-dispatcher connectivity among the King County, City of Tacoma, Snohomish County, Port of Seattle, Washington State Patrol, and the federal Integrated Wireless Network (IWN) systems. Additionally, these links provide local, state, and federal agencies interoperability at the field user level during major emergencies or daily operations.

The second solution allows out-of-band, out-of-area radio users to communicate via radio with users on the King County, City of Tacoma, Snohomish County, Port of Seattle, and the IWN. Very high frequency (VHF), ultra high frequency (UHF), and 800 megahertz (MHz) radio frequency control stations were connected to the dispatcher consoles of these systems. Using these control stations, out-of-band, and users of disparate radios can access existing talk groups through the dispatchers to allow interagency communications.

To support additional agencies responding to an incident or to establish communications in areas with limited radio coverage, the third solution provides five mobile interoperability audio switches to area agencies. These switches are owned by the FBI, King County, City of Tacoma, Snohomish County, and the Port of Seattle. At an incident scene, each interoperability switch can provide basic voice communications interoperability for up to 12 radio systems. In addition to providing equipment and installation services, DOJ ensured that technicians received training from the audio switch manufacturer, JPS Communications, to effectively operate the new equipment and interoperability capabilities.

In support of these solutions, operational assistance was provided through the development of standard operating procedures (SOP) to ensure effective and sustained use of the interoperability solutions. To coordinate common operating procedures for the new interoperability solutions, DOJ worked with the Tri-County Operations Subcommittee, composed of local, state, and federal agencies. This collaborative effort resulted in the development of an SOP to address rules of use for patching channels to other radio systems and deploying mobile audio switches. The Subcommittee continues to meet to update procedures and discuss interoperability efforts in the Seattle metropolitan area.

## Communication Exercise

On January 21, 2005, participating Seattle agencies held an operational exercise to test the TRIS. During the exercise, dispatchers created patches among the six connected radio systems to test all interoperability talk groups. Simulated traffic was used to evaluate the system performance and operational procedures.

## Moving Forward

The cooperation and support between participating agencies and DOJ WMO provided scalable solutions designed to give additional agencies access to the interoperability solutions. Sustained operations, maintenance, and support of these interoperability solutions will be coordinated by key stakeholders. These efforts, along with the area’s long-term interoperability plans, will ensure continuity in addressing interoperable communications among public safety agencies in the Seattle metropolitan area.

## Contact Information

If you would like to know more about this initiative or have questions, please contact—

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